

HERE BEGINNETH THE BOOK CALLED DECAMERON AND SURNAMED PRINCE GALA-
HALT WHEREIN ARE CONTAINED AN HUNDRED STORIES IN TEN DAYS TOLD BY
SEVEN LADIES AND THREE YOUNG MEN

PROEM

A KINDLY thing it is to have compassion of the afflicted and albeit it well beseemeth every one, yet of those is it more particularly required who have erst had need of comfort and have found it in any, amongst whom, if ever any had need thereof or held it dear or took pleasure therein aforetimes, certes, I am one of these. For that, having from my first youth unto this present been beyond measure inflamed with a very high and noble passion (higher and nobler, perchance, than might appear, were I to relate it, to sort with my low estate) albeit by persons of discretion who had intelligence thereof I was commended therefor and accounted so much the more worth, natheless a passing sore travail it was to me to bear it, not, certes, by reason of the cruelty of the beloved lady, but because of the exceeding ardour begotten in my breast of an ill-ordered appetite, for which, for that it suffered me not to stand content at any reasonable bounds, caused me oftentimes feel more chagrin than I had occasion for. In this my affliction the pleasant discourse of a certain friend of mine and his admirable consolations afforded me such refreshment that I firmly believe of these it came that I died not. But, as it pleased Him who, being Himself infinite, hath for immutable law appointed unto all things mundane that they shall have an end, my love,—beyond every other fervent and which nor stress of reasoning nor counsel, no, nor yet manifest shame nor

peril that might ensue thereof, had availed either to break or to bend,—of its own motion, in process of time, on such wise abated that of itself at this present it hath left me only that pleasure which it is used to afford unto whoso adventureth himself not too far in the navigation of its profounder oceans; by reason whereof, all chagrin being done away, I feel it grown delightful, whereas it used to be grievous. Yet, albeit the pain hath ceased, not, therefore, is the memory fled of the benefits whilom received and the kindnesses bestowed on me by those to whom, of the goodwill they bore me, my troubles were grievous; nor, as I deem, will it ever pass away, save for death. And for that gratitude, to my thinking, is, among the other virtues, especially commendable and its contrary blameworthy, I have, that I may not appear ungrateful, bethought myself, now that I can call myself free, to endeavour, in that little which is possible to me, to afford some relief, in requital of that which I received aforetime,—if not to those who succoured me and who, belike, by reason of their good sense or of their fortune, have no occasion therefor,—to those, at least, who stand in need thereof. And albeit my support, or rather I should say my comfort, may be and indeed is of little enough avail to the afflicted, natheless meseemeth it should rather be proffered whereas the need appeareth greater, as well because it will there do more service as

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for that it will still be there the liefer had. And who will deny that this [comfort], whatsoever [worth] it be, it behoveth much more to give unto lovesick ladies than unto men? For that these within their tender bosoms, fearful and shamefast, hold hid the fires of love (which those who have proved know how much more puissance they have than those which are manifest), and constrained by the wishes, the pleasures, the commandments of fathers, mothers, brothers and husbands, abide most time enmewed in the narrow compass of their chambers and sitting in a manner idle, willing and willing not in one breath, revolve in themselves various thoughts which it is not possible should still be merry. By reason whereof if there arise in their minds any melancholy, bred of ardent desire, needs must it with grievous annoy abide therein, except it be done away by new discourse; more by token that they are far less strong than men to endure. With men in love it happeneth not on this wise, as we may manifestly see. They, if any melancholy or heaviness of thought oppress them, have many means of easing it or doing it away, for that to them, an they have a mind thereto, there lacketh not commodity of going about hearing and seeing many things, fowling, hunting, fishing, riding, gaming and trafficking; each of which means hath, altogether or in part, power to draw the mind unto itself and to divert it from troublous thought, at least for some space of time, whereafter, one way or another, either solacement super-

veneth or else the annoy groweth less. Wherefore, to the end that the unright of Fortune may by me in part be amended, which, where there is the less strength to endure, as we see it in delicate ladies, hath there been the more niggard of support, I purpose, for the succour and solace of ladies in love (unto others* the needle and the spindle and the reel suffice) to recount an hundred stories or fables or parables or histories or whatever you like to style them, in ten days' time related by an honourable company of seven ladies and three young men made in the days of the late deadly pestilence, together with sundry canzonets sung by the aforesaid ladies for their diversion. In these stories will be found love-chances,† both gladsome and grievous, and other accidents of fortune befallen as well in times present as in days of old, whereof the ladies aforesaid, who shall read them, may at once take solace from the delectable things therein shown forth and useful counsel, inasmuch as they may learn thereby what is to be eschewed and what is on like wise to be ensued,—the which methinketh cannot betide without cease of chagrin. If it happen thus (as God grant it may) let them render thanks therefor to Love, who, by loosing me from his bonds, hath vouchsafed me the power of applying myself to the service of their pleasures.

* *i.e.* those not in love.

† Syn. adventures (*casi*).